

Ellsworth Johnson #34
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Q: Mr. Johnson, what ship were you stationed on at Pearl Harbor?

A: I was on the USS *Dobbin* AD3 which was a destroyer tender.

Q: What were your duties on the *Dobbin*?

A: Well, I was a fireman at the time. I was in the engine room.

Q: When did you first realize that morning that there was something out of the ordinary going on?

A: About 30 seconds after it started. Being a Sunday morning, I had just had breakfast and had gone up to the fantail to relax for the day because no work; it wasn't church time yet. So I was just on the fantail relaxing when we saw the first planes drop bombs on Ford Island.

Q: Tell me what you saw?

A: Well, when we saw the planes coming in we heard a couple of explosions and we looked around and we saw the Japanese planes, but we didn't recognize at that time, the Rising Sun on the planes. So the first thing we said was, "Gosh, it's a heck of a time of day, on a Sunday morning, for the Air Force to be holding practice." And about that time we saw one of the hangars explode and go up in the air, and we began to realize it was just more than practice. And approximately the same time, it couldn't have been but just a matter of seconds, they sounded General Quarters.

Q: Where was your battle station?

A: My battle station was down in the Repair Five, which is engineering repair.

Q: Is that below decks?

A: That's on the second deck. And my place was just in the passage way above the Engine Room. And basically we were... our job would be to either uh... help with trying to control any damage that happened or if they needed release in the Engine Room; anything of this nature.

Q: What did you do once you got down to your battle station?

A: Well, first when we got down there, why we just all mustered at our battle station and were standing by, waiting for further orders for anything to go on; anything that might need. Sometimes our phone talker was on the J phone system which was connected with all the engineering department, and we had one man that was connected to topside and he would tell us, or we would hear bits

of information going over, and our phone talker would repeat that to us what was happening. So we had an idea of some of the damage being done, but yet we could see nothing.

So shortly afterwards, I don't know how long it was, just a matter of minutes I suppose, and they passed the word that they wanted men from Repair Five to go down to the armory and help carry machine guns up to the topside. We had quite a few .30-caliber machine guns stored down there that they could use. They were for landing parties and such as that. Of course we had the .50-calibers had already been installed; they were mounted permanently, but these .30-calibers were all portable. So we carried them up topside to the boat deck for the parties up there to use for shooting at planes that came close.

Well at this time the *Arizona* had already been hit, and a couple of the other battleships. From where we were, we could see the fires, and see the stern of the ship was beginning to go down. Well that basically was about all you could see. And there were a few planes coming by, well, we weren't allowed to stay topside. As soon as we got the machine guns up and turned them over to crews up there, we were to go back down again, to our station. So that basically was all I could see of the action.

Well I had returned down to Repair Five and we were sitting there waiting for further orders when we got a report from some of the fellows down in the shaft alley, which was well a stern, that they thought we had had a hit. Now basically what it was was a bomb that had dropped off our starboard stern, oh, approximately 50 yards off. And uh... course the terrific concussion is what shook the ship and everybody had thought we had a hit. But shrapnel did fly aboard, and one of our aft 3-inch gun crews received some of the shrapnel and there were three men killed by shrapnel. That was the only damage we received, although the side of the ship and even the gun barrels had shrapnel holes in them. Not all the way through, but just enough that it could be seen, and we knew what it was.

Well basically, that is just about all we had during our action down below, because there wasn't a great deal we could see. Everything we got was from reports going on topside.

Q: When was it that you finally got up to topside?

A: Uh, it was after the second attack, and of course we lay our good fortune to the fact that we had five destroyers, which was the *Hull*, *Dewey*, *Worden*, *MacDonough*, and the *Phelps*, were all alongside. And uh, they had all their guns in operation, which put up quite a big fire control over us, and weren't too many planes that got too near us.

Q: So how long did the *Dobbin* stay at anchor there?

A: Uh, well we... after the second wave broke off, uh the destroyers got alongside. They were all in for repairs and they had all their fires out. They were cold iron. We furnished them with fuel, water, and whatever they needed, and they all took off the go to sea. But we let off our engines and we moved over

toward Aiea, in more shallow water. And the thinking was, that if we got over there where there were maybe only four feet of water under us, if we did get another hit, or got a hit at any time, we wouldn't have far to sail. They wouldn't lose the ship. It would be beached, or drowned, and that way it would be much easier to salvage the ship, or save it.

Q: What one incident stands out in your mind more than any other, about the Pearl Harbor Attack... in your memory?

A: Well, there's only a couple of them, and one was the first sighting of the planes and the bombing, when they came over Ford Island, and the other one is when I got back topside and could see the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma* laying over there in the water.

Q: What was you feeling when you first saw the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma*?

A: Well, I don't know really. Never tried to put a feeling on it. I guess it was one of shock, and awe, and we just wondered how much more damage we would have before the darn thing could be over with.

Q: O.K. Well, I thank you for coming up and sharing your memories.

A: Well, your welcome. Wish I could give you more.

Q: Well, you've given us quite a bit.

A: Because.... well, that's alright go ahead.